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ABSTRACT

Methods of working with foreign students, especially those from Malaysia, have been modified at Southern Illinois University. Problems have arisen in dealing with two different groups of Malaysian students: recent graduates from secondary schools, and graduates of Malaysian teacher training colleges. The first group comprises very young students, far from home and experiencing the stress of culture shock. The second group poses problems in dealing with transfer of credits, assessing individual records from three different Malaysian education agencies, and time allowed for program completion. While most students know some English, language proficiency is a problem, particularly since a requirement of the program is student teaching. There have been some difficulties in placing Malaysian student teachers in local schools. Some students have also resisted taking required courses in American history or government, viewing them as irrelevant to their needs. Procedures used to alleviate these and other problems are described in this paper. Case studies are presented of Malaysian students majoring in English, mathematics, educational media, guidance and counseling, and science. (JD)

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ADJUSTING AN AMERICAN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM TO MEET THE NEEDS OF MALAYSIAN STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

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by

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Introduction

For the past three years, the College of Education at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale has had an interesting and expanding experience with students from Malaysia. Working with Malaysian students was not a new experience for us in that we have had a number of graduate students from Malaysia in our College since the mid-seventies. In fact, we trained the first Ph.D.'s in Education from the State of Sabah in our College. For these past three years, however, we have been working with Malaysian undergraduates in our teacher preparation programs for whom all field experiences are required. While this has been an interesting and, in many ways, a unique experience for us, it has also been fraught with frustration and problems to solve which were specific to working with this group of students.

Since the number of Malaysians coming to this country has grown in greater numbers these past few years, and since it is anticipated that Malaysian students will continue to come to U.S. universities and colleges in greater numbers, this I.C.E.T. program was proposed to share our experience with other U.S. institutions. Perhaps our experiences with this group of international students will help other institutions plan for the integration of international students into their programs. Likewise, the international members of ICET may be interested in our work with the Malaysian students.

SIU-C has had good interaction with the Malaysian Ministry of Education and MARA for nearly ten years now. More recently we have also

worked with the Sabah Foundation. Our director of International Education for the past six years has assisted both of these agencies with the placement of their students at numerous universities and colleges throughout the country. So, it was understandable that the College of Education would eventually be asked to enroll baccalaureate level students in teacher education programs.

In the past, we had not enrolled international students in the last phase of the Professional Education Sequence. This was primarily due to three reasons. The first was the problem of language which prohibited placement of the students in student teaching. The second was that Illinois certification requires citizenship. In order to avoid any misunderstanding of a student's qualifications for teaching in Illinois, student teaching was eliminated, although some international students had a modified experience of 4 semester hours. The third reason was that many international students had a desire to take as much course work as possible and so the hours usually used for student teaching were fulfilled with extra courses selected by the students. Students who wanted programs differing greatly from our stated teacher education majors were placed in Special Majors. The rest completed a stated major with a waiver of the student teaching hours. Since the Malaysian officials wanted their students to be fully qualified to enter a teaching position upon their return to Malaysia, our past method of advising international students had to be modified.

One problem immediately surfaced. We were receiving students from three different Malaysian agencies: the Ministry of Education, MARA, and the Sabah Foundation. We had to become acquainted with these three agencies. We had to learn about their roles and functions in the education

system in Malaysia and how they differed in expectations, rules, and functions. This was somewhat confusing at first. Fortunately, officials of the agencies visited campus frequently, and I visited Kuala Lampur, so we were able to differentiate better as time went on. Even with the apparent understanding that we had, it has only been in the past year that some rules have been clearly interpreted as applying to all students regardless of sponsoring agency.

We solved the problem of keeping students identified by agency by working closely with the Office of International Education on our campus. They keep records of all students' sponsors. They provided us lists of students and their sponsors which we used to make sure students were enrolled as expected.

Types of Students

There are two types of students who are enrolling in our B.S. Degree programs. One is the recent graduate of a Malaysian Secondary School. These students ordinarily enter with no college credits and possibly some advanced credit resulting from tests taken in their country.

The second type of student is the graduate of a teachers' training college. They have completed a two to three year program in a Malaysian teacher's college. Some of these students have had advanced work for one year at the Specialist Teacher Training Institute. Some have had additional work in Australia or Great Britain.

Problems unique to the two groups

The problems in dealing with the two groups differ. In the case of the teachers' college graduates, there were basically three problems to

deal with: transfer of credit, records from Malaysia, and time allowed for completion of the program.

The articulation of the course work from the Malaysian teachers' colleges was difficult at first. The general education content is integrated in many courses with methods. It was difficult for our Admissions and Records staff to identify general education courses and/or content. I worked very closely with our Admissions and Records Office since I was familar with some of the Teachers' Colleges' course syllabi. We requested as many syllabi as we could identify and were able to eventually identify some specific general education course work. This was a critical point for us and for these students since SIU-C requires 45 semester hours of general education in a 120 hour B.S. Degree. Students graduating from any of the teachers' colleges since 1978 have had the same program since the curriculum is now uniform. So transcripts of more recent graduates are easier to articulate than those of older graduates. Some of the transcripts of graduates of the 1960's or early 70's are very vague and non-descriptive.

This has lead to a second problem. We have been unable to get syllabi or detailed descriptions of transcripts for older graduates (prior to mid 70's). Without this documentation, we have been unable to articulate transfer of credit for some of their work. Our Admissions and Records office has awarded a minimum of 30 semester hours across the board. If general education subjects can be identified, hours are assigned in the five categories we use at SIU-C. If not, the hours are used for education courses.

A third problem relates to the students' goals. Many of these students have been sent to the United States to finish not only the B.S.

Degree but to also obtain a Master's degree and, in some cases, a Ph.D. In some cases, the time allowed for obtaining two degrees is not enough. The students have felt extremely pressured and have taken 18 to 21 hours a semester in order to meet the expectation.

The problems with the 17- to 18-year old recent graduates are different from those of the experienced students. One of the first things that we noted was the extremely young age at which these students leave secondary school and enter the university setting. They are about a year younger than our entering freshmen at the university. This has presented problems, not just with the students in education, but among all of the Malaysian students who come as freshmen. Not only are they away from home for the first time, but they are a great distance away from home. The cultural differences, particularly those related to religious differences, set them apart from other students, and this in itself has created some problems.

Probably the most noticeable problem in working with the students has been the language problem. Prior to 1980, students entering the University from Malaysia had excellent English language skills. We rarely had difficulty with students in the classes, with perhaps the exception of those from the outlying areas of Sabah. But, in more recent years, the language skills of Malaysian students have not been as good as those of the previous entries into the university.

A change of philosophy in the Malaysian school system has brought the Malayan language into prominence and the English language has not been used as a dominant language in the school culture. Thus, more recent graduates have had less experience with English.

On our campus this problem is aggravated by the fact that we have such a huge Malaysian population. The students tend to stay together, to live together, and to spend their time together. They can therefore avoid the use of English most of the time. They do well in our classes in terms of the written language, but they do have difficulty with the spoken language.

This, of course, leads to problems when we start planning for placement in the public schools. We had planned to provide all pre-student teaching field experiences and student teaching experiences for these students, but we did indicate to Ministry of Education and Mara officials that if a student could not handle the language, he/she could not participate in the student teaching experience. Our hope was that few, if any, students would experience this difficulty by the junior and senior year. The problem is not as great in the first field experiences as, of course, it would be in the student teaching experiences. I will discuss this problem more fully later in terms of some of the specific majors.

Another difficulty which we have experienced with these students, and sometimes the older students as well, is acceptance of some of our requirements that are definitely related to the American school system. All students completing certification programs in the State of Illinois must have American history or government. I have had more than one Malaysian student in my office arguing that this has no relevance to him/her, and my response as well as the University response has been that if the student desires a degree from our college, and since their government officials have asked us to provide their students with the same program our students take, they must take this course which is, in

fact, a part of the program. They are therefore not exempt from the American history and government course. We believe that it is a reasonable expectation for students studying in the United States to have some understanding of U.S. government or history.

Likewise, a course in our Professional Education Sequence meets the requirement of most universities for a history or philosophy of education course. These students do come with a background in the history and philosophy of education and it is, no doubt, a fairly decent background. Much of the material is that which you would find in courses in both Great Britain and the United States. However, our particular course has a strong emphasis on American education. The course is called School and Society, and it has a strong focus on laws, particularly P.L. 94-142, and other rules and regulations which govern education in the state and in the United States. So it is a course, regardless of how much background they might have had in another teacher training institution, which we require them to take.

The resistance has been moderate, to say the least. But it has been there, and we have had a number of discussions with students regarding these courses. Basically, though, they are accepting of the program as it is provided to them.

As a university in a very rural area, student teaching placements were another problem which we had to contend with. Our centers for placing student teachers are located primarily in small towns and communities in southern Illinois. We do have placements in Belleville, which is close to East St. Louis, and we do have placements in Chicago. However, it was our intention to, as much as possible, keep the Malaysian students in the local setting. Our center coordinators were directed to make specific inquiries into the possibility of placements of student teachers in the local school systems.

One fortunate thing which happened, (and which I believe has made this placement easier for us at this time) was the influx of southeast Asian refugees from Laos, Cambodia, and Viet Nam into the school systems in the area. Whereas 10 years ago a southeast Asian student teacher would have been a very unique person in most of these schools, now the teachers and the children in these school systems have had southeast Asian students among them for six to eight years. The response from the school systems has been positive. In no case were we told "no" absolutely. The one stipulation which was placed on us and these student teachers was a command of the English language. Our local school boards and our local population become very upset when they believe their students are not getting a good education by their standards, and one of the things which they knew could be a problem was the language of the students.

We discussed this situation with the officials from the Ministry of Education and from Mara in terms of a "tolerance level" in our local school systems. We knew that we not only had the problem of clearing placement of international students in the systems, but we also had to deal with how many international students a school system could take at one time. We talked of this in terms of a "tolerance level" in the school system. It was our intention to place no more than two or three Malaysian students in any one semester in any one school system, and to date we have not had a problem with our placements. We have also said from the beginning that some students may have to go to Chicago or to Belleville if the tolerance level in the area close to Carbondale becomes too high.

Finally, a major problem which we had to work out with Malaysian officials was the acceptance of the College of Education degree. We

perhaps are unique at SIU, although I don't believe we are unusual, in that a student may choose the college in which the degree is to be obtained. For example, a student may choose to major in music, following the same program of study, in either the College of Education or the College of Communications and Fine Arts. The work with the Malaysian students involves a great deal of time for the College of Education. We believe that we should have responsibility for the students in order to monitor more closely and more readily their progress in the program. And so at the time they came, we established a policy that they would be enrolled in the College of Education, and that we would assume responsibility to their government for their progress in the program. It became apparent very readily that the programs desired for these students and the label College of Education did not seem to match. It took us a long time and many discussions to really understand why and what the problem was. Eventually it came down to the fact that a student majoring in English or mathematics in Malaysia would have a very content laden program. In other words, they would not take all the general studies that our college or university requires; they would take basically three years of the content that they were majoring in. Of course, understanding this eliminated the arguments about whether a student should be in the College of Education, or College of Liberal Arts or College of Science, because they would in fact have the same program in any College preparing teachers. The problem was actually a bigger problem in terms of the content hours in a major at the undergraduate level at our university. (I suspect this would be an issue at any university in this country since almost all of us have a goodly number of general studies hours in a student's program.) This has been resolved in essentially two ways. The student who completes the traditional College of Education teacher education

preparation program then completes the master's degree in a content area, giving the student three complete years of content work. Students who complete a bachelor's degree in another college then take the College of Education professional education component and the master's degree in the content area. This satisfies the requirement of three years of content.

Procedures Followed in the College

I would like to describe to you now the procedures which we use in advising the Malaysian students, since we have tried to provide a very close monitoring of their progress in the College of Education. When the student applies to the university and indicates a major, the paperwork is sent to the College of Education. Those students who are new graduates from high schools enter as any other freshman student and follow the prescribed program for that major. Those students who come to us from the Malaysian Teacher's College, however, present a different situation. After Admissions and Records determines the general studies credits which I mentioned earlier, I personally review their transcripts and records of employment to determine those courses in the Professional Education Sequence which would not have to be repeated. For the most part, for the students who have completed the teacher training program, and have been successful teachers, no additional experiences are required in pre-student teaching or student teaching coursework. All students, regardless of prior experience, take our Human Growth and Development course and the School and Society course, which I mentioned earlier.

After my review of the education sequence, any work which has been completed which could appropriately be counted in a major is reviewed by

the faculty of the major. The faculty at that time determines whether or not courses will be accepted in lieu of SIU-C courses or whether proficiencies will be required to determine if course work completed in Malaysia is comparable. The one area in which course work in Malaysia has not proven to be comparable has been the area of music. Few, if any, of the students who were music students in Malaysia have been able to successfully move to a second or third level of music classes in theory, harmony and basic background work. In all the cases I know of, students have had to repeat the basic courses. This has been a problem in that the music courses are sequenced over a three-year period, and this, then, requires that a student be here for three years to complete the baccalaureate degree in the music department. An area in which proficiency has been very successful is the physical education major. Several of the physical education majors have been able to obtain proficiency credit and thereby eliminate taking some of the course work required in our program.

Specific Majors

To date, we have worked with a number of different majors from Malaysia. Some of those that have provided the most contact time and which I will speak about today are English, math, educational media, guidance and counseling, and sciences.

We were asked to take a large number of students to major in English at SIU-C. In the beginning, about 50 students were sent to our campus to be processed through our TESL facility and then they were to be either enrolled at SIU-C or sent on to other institutions in the midwest. We determined that given the tolerance level of our local school systems

which I described earlier, we could probably at best keep about 12 students in the English major. In order to determine those 12 students, our English education professor, our Coordinator for Teacher Education Services, and our Assistant Coordinator for Professional Education Experiences met with those students in the group of 50 who met our entrance requirements. As a result of the interviews, 12 individuals were selected to complete the program here.

As we monitored the students' progress, it became apparent that there were problems in two areas. The first problem, which showed up immediately in the English classes, was the lack of literature background which these students had. They had great difficulty in the English literature classes on campus. The second problem area showed up in their composition classes. As they became involved with some of the English Education professors, the difficulty they were having with both oral and written English caused great apprehension in terms of considering placing them in public schools to teach English to American children. Since the goal for these teachers was to return to Malaysia to teach English as a Second Language, we discussed their problems with the Ministry of Education officials and asked if they could be transferred to the undergraduate linguistics major. The major problem with this transfer was that we do not have a TESL certification program. We did agree that if students were to transfer to the linguistics program, we would permit them to take all of the Professional Education Sequence up to student teaching, and, if desired, we would attempt to find placements in some of the local school systems in classrooms where English as a Second Language is taught. No promises could be made since very few TESL classes occur in our local schools.

The outcome of this situation was that the Ministry of Education official recognized that it was unfair to the students to continue them in a program in which they could not make satisfactory progress. In fact, we had determined that several would not meet the GPA requirements for entry into the Professional Education Sequence. An agreement was reached whereby those students having difficulty in the English major would enter into the linguistics major and complete their program in linguistics.

A second area in which students have shown little difficulty has been in the sciences. We have had both chemistry and physics majors, a few of whom have successfully completed student teaching, although most have elected to wait until return to their country to complete the student teaching portion of the program. This will probably delay them about a year in terms of obtaining a job, but they understand this when they elect to postpone the student teaching experience. In almost all cases this choice has been made because of a language difficulty. This has presented a problem in Malaysia, however, in that many teachers are being trained in Malaysia, and there are not always as many slots available for placement as are needed, so some of these students must wait for an available student teaching placement to complete their training.

The mathematics major was one in which differences between the British lecture method of teaching and the methods which are being taught in our math education department were most prominent. Our Math Education faculty use videotaping as a part of their methodology classes and one of the first groups that had Malaysian students in it presented us with this problem. The Malaysian students had been videotaped and reviewed by their professor. I received a call from the Math education

faculty member who said, "Nancy, I want you to come down and watch this videotape. I think we have a problem." As I watched I realized that we did have a problem in that the young lady was teaching as she had been taught in her high school mathematics classes in Malaysia. It was strictly a lecture, and a very stilted one at that. Dr. Pederson said to me, "You know, this won't work in our math classes in the public schools. She won't last a week with the teachers with whom I place our student teachers." We had quite a task before us to prepare these students for our local classrooms. Fortunately our math education methods faculty member is a very concerned educator. She enjoyed working with Malaysian students, and she has made great efforts to help them accommodate to our schools. We also decided at that point that in negotations with the public schools, our center coordinators would need to make teachers aware that the Malaysian students came from a different educational environment. We agreed that if they could not handle the classroom situation in our settings, they would participate and observe but would not be given the level of responsibility that our students would ordinarily have. In other words, they might not be expected to have complete classroom responsibility as early in the program as our students would nor as comprehensive an experience as our students have. We believed that some success would be more desirable than total failure.

Two other groups of students provided us with a very unique experience. They were the educational media students and the guidance and counseling students. We do not have undergraduate majors in either of these areas. We do have an undergraduate minor in educational media. We had three students presented to us for media, and eight students for guidance and counseling. I went to the faculty of these two areas and the department

chairpersons and asked them if they were interested in working with these students.

I indicated that the students could work through a special major. They agreed that they were interested in working with the students. I then went to the Dean of General Academic Affairs and told her that we had the potential for three students in Educational Media and eight in Guidance and Counseling to come here from Malaysia to study. I indicated that I understood that a special major was to be especially designed for one individual, but in these cases we would be sending through three programs exactly alike for educational media and eight exactly alike for guidance and counseling. I asked her if she would permit this to happen. She agreed to this request; and so our faculty in these two areas developed undergraduate programs that were approved as special majors with the understanding that these two groups of students would complete the master's degree in both their respective areas at SIU-C.

The media program, I must say, went more smoothly than the guidance and counseling program. It was apparent from almost the beginning that it is necessary for guidance counselors to have experience with some kind of teaching prior to understanding the problems that go with guidance and counseling. The immaturity of these students and the lack of experience with students either in Malaysia or the United States, did present problems with the undergraduate guidance and counseling program. However, we were able to work out practicum experiences which provided a base for the master's degree program. Both groups of students are progressing very well in these majors.

Benefits of This Endeavor

The College of Education has benefited in a number of ways from this attempt to work with a large number of international students from Malaysia. While there have been moments of deep frustration, there have also been many moments of deep satisfaction and a feeling of success in working with these students.

Advisors, for example, have developed an ability to interpret out-of-country transcripts. They now are not completely baffled by transcripts from not only Malaysia, but from other institutions in other countries as well. Although I still give final approval to the interpretation or articulation of international students' transcripts, the advisors are now much more capable of interpreting to the student how the transcript has been articulated and the advantages received by the student from having had their transcript reviewed and course work given appropriate credit in our program.

A second benefit has been from some of the faculty involvement with international students. We have observed a growing understanding of the needs of these students and a growing understanding of cultural differences from dealing with persons from other countries. In some cases faculty have had to assess their teaching in terms of its appropriateness for individuals from another culture. This in turn has created a sensitivity to cultural differences within our own population.

Another decided benefit has been the interaction of our American students with the international students in their classes. This has brought about interaction and discussion. In many classes, it is reported that the Malaysian students' perception of both their country and our country has been shared with our students and the probability of using certain methodologies in their classes upon return to their country has

created very interesting and stimulating discussions with our students.

It has, I think, been of benefit to us and to our local schools to involve international students in the field experience component. In almost every case it has worked out well. In a few instances where the international student's language skills were lacking, the local teacher handled the situation with skill and compassion toward the student. The student was helped through the situation in a way that he/she did not lose face with the pupils in the classroom or with other students on campus in his/her major.

Finally, it has been very rewarding to watch the faculty in the college respond with a willingness to help prepare individuals to return to their home country to teach. Changes in class assignments and accommodations for Malaysian practices have been exhibited by our faculty members. They have been eager to listen to students in an effort to understand more completely the situations they will return to. It has also been helpful to have had a number of faculty from our college who have spent time in southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Viet Nam. Their on-site knowledge of these countries has been very helpful in terms of interpreting the needs of Malaysian students to our faculty who have not traveled in that part of the world.

It has been my privilege to share with you today this case study of an American institution's attempt to seriously try to meet the needs of another country's students in our teacher education program. We have learned a great deal from this experience. It has been a very unique and rewarding one for those of us who have been involved directly with the students and with their preparation for teaching. We are now discussing with the Ministry of Education in Malaysia a plan which would allow the

students to complete student teaching in their country. The Ministry of Education has developed a plan which I think is very workable. It would provide students enrolled in our program to return for the student teaching semester in Malaysia.

I would be happy to answer any questions which you have about any part of this presentation. Thank you.